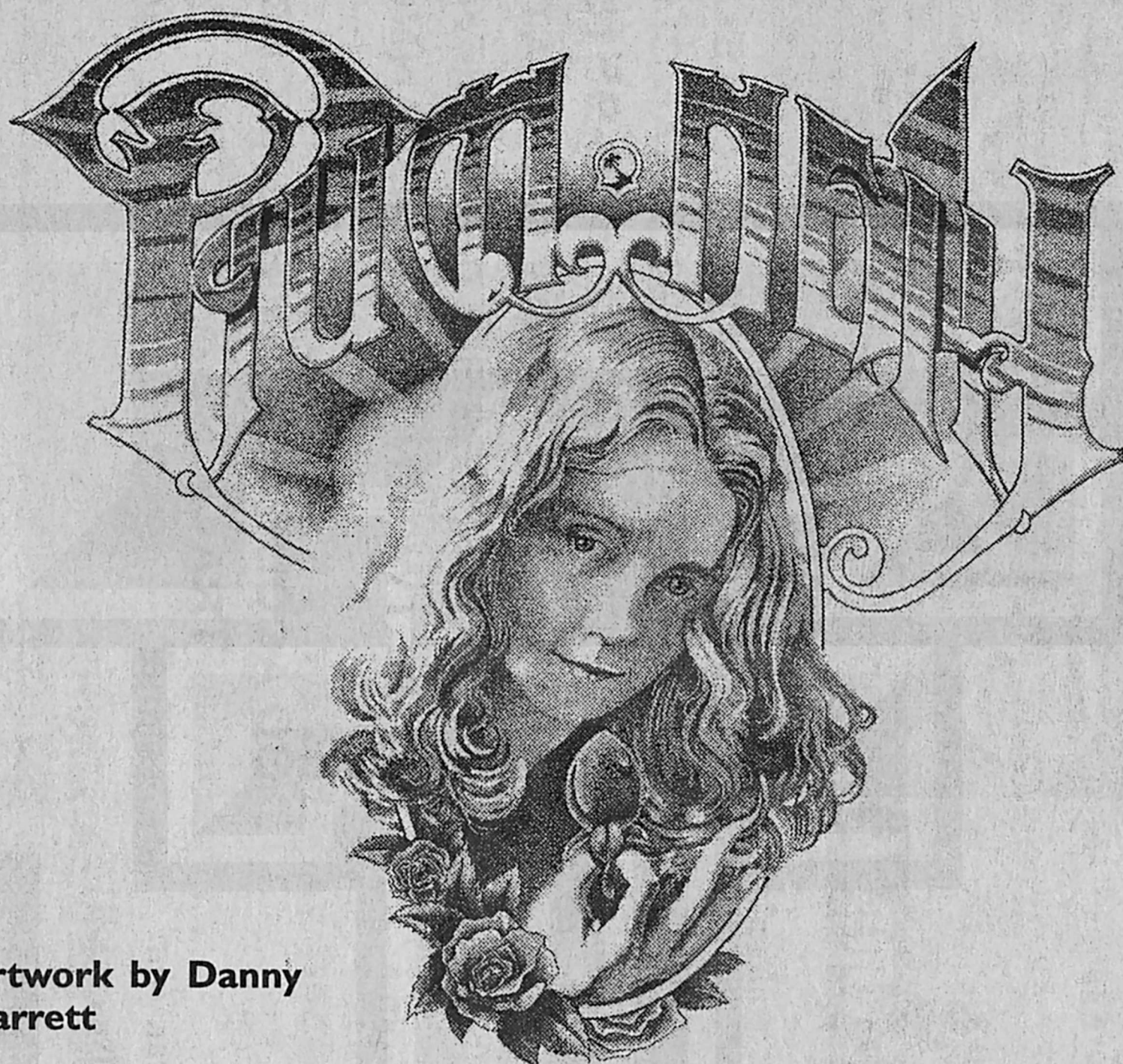


3rd COAST MUSIC

PLUM NELLY

#191/280 DECEMBER 2012



Artwork by Danny
Garrett

BILLBOARD KILLS COUNTRY
(what's left of it)

•
JOHN THE REVEALATOR

•
FREEFORM AMERICAN ROOTS #160

•
ROOT BIRTHS & DEATHS

•
REVIEWS

******* (or not)**

MAC CURTIS • MICHAEL KOPPY
CHRIS O'CONNELL • DAVID OLNEY

THE SWEETBACK SISTERS

GEORGE WIRTH

'None Of The Hits All Of The Time'



FREEFORM AMERICAN ROOTS #160

REAL MUSIC PLAYED FOR REAL PEOPLE BY REAL DJs

DURING NOVEMBER 2012

#1 James Hand: Mighty Lonesome Man

(Hillgrass Bluebilly) *AMS/*BL/*KF/*KP/*RS/*SH/*ST

2 Buddy Miller & Jim Lauderdale: Buddy And Jim (New West)

*BP/*DWB/*GM/*JB/*LMG/*MI/*MT/*MW/*RF

3 Billy Bratcher: In The Lobby (Cow Island)

*DJ/*GS/*JF/*JT/*TA

4 Rosie Flores: Working Girl's Guitar (Bloodshot)

*JM/*NA/*PGS

5 Kevin Deal: There Goes The Neighborhood (Blind Fellow)

*HT/*MF/*MP

6= Janis Martin: The Blanco Sessions (Cow Island)

*RT/*TR/*TS

Ronstadt Generations y Los Tucsonenses: Prelude (self)

*MB/*RG/*RH/*TF

7 Iris DeMent: Sing The Delta (Flariella) *CJ/*KW

8 Lindi Ortega: Cigarettes & Truckstops (Last Gang) *LB/*SR

9 Jamey Johnson: Living For A Song;

A Tribute To Hank Cochran (Mercury)

10 Annie Lou: Grandma's Rules For Drinking (Hearth Music)

*AA/*AH

11 Dwight Yoakam: 3 Pears (Warner Brothers) *KR

12 Corb Lund: Cabin Fever (New West) *TL

13= Chris O'Connell: Be Right Back! (Song) *TB

Cam Penner: To Build A Fire (Rawlco Radio)

14 JD Hobson Band: Where the Sun Don't Shine (Hearth) *BB

15= Billy Don Burns: Nights When I'm Sober;

Portrait of a Honky Tonk Singer (Rusty Knuckles)

John Hiatt: Mystic Pinball (New West) *CF

Chris Wall: El Western Motel (Cold Spring) *EW

Whitehorse: The Fate Of The World Depends On This Kiss

(Six Shooter) *CTS

16= Birds Of Chicago (self) *GN

Jesse Dayton: Jesse Sings Kinky (Stag)

The Departed: Adventus (Underground Sound) *JZ

17= Trevor Alguire: Till Sorrow Begins To Call (self) *FH

Lilly Hiatt & The Dropped Ponies: Let Down (Normaltown)

Chris Knight: Little Victories (Drifter's Church)

Linda McRae: Rough Edges & Ragged Hearts (42rpm) *RA

Ed Pettersen: I Curse The River Of Time (Split Rock) *RC



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WHERE MUSIC STILL MATTERS

*XX = DJ's Album of the Month, see chart IDs at tcmnradio.com/far

CAN THIS REALLY BE THE END?

Soviet-era black humor: two collective farm managers run into each other. One asks, "So, Gregor Gregorovitch, how are things at the Great Red October collective?" and the other answers, "Well, Ivan Ivanovitch, things are average." "How do you mean 'average'?" "I mean worse than last year, but not as bad as next year." There are many universal truths implied in this joke, think Republican presidential candidates (worse than the last one but not as bad as the next one), but, in the 3CM context, I've found it applies particularly to commercial country music—whenever you think it's hit rock bottom, next year it always manages to get worse. Well, brace yourselves because it's about to get a whole lot worse. In fact, we're talking nosedive into oblivion.

Let me say at the outset that I have no dog in this fight. I haven't looked at *Billboard's* country chart in years, in fact I'm not entirely sure I've ever looked at it, there's no relevance for my purposes. However, up until recently, for those who are interested in commercial country, *Billboard* did at least report which songs were supposedly most played on 1200 country stations. No longer. The magazine has revised its criteria and now includes not just digital sales and online streams but, more consequentially, *any* airplay on *any* station.

This upset genre-specific stations a good deal. For instance, rap radio was incensed by *Billboard's* Rap #1, *Gangnam Style*, which no rap station was playing it because, well, there's no actual rap in it as such, which I'd consider a plus but I can see how the deficiency might not sit well with people who are into rap. Similarly, R&B radio MDs were pissed about Rihanna sitting on top of the R&B/Hip Hop chart with what they considered to be a pop song. However, the biggest beneficiary of *Billboard's* new rules by far is Taylor Swift, indeed one commentator labelled them 'Taylor Made.' Even though *We Are Never Ever Getting Back Together* was released in two mixes, country and pop, every single spin of either mix on any station counted towards the country chart, so a song that had stalled out at #13 under the old system went straight to #1 in the same chart under the new one.

Billboard has essentially ruled that genres are no longer autonomous. The new methodology doesn't just reward crossover artists and punish 'purists' (in quotes because I'm using the term very loosely), it actually *requires* crossover success. In the olden days, ie up to until mid-October, crossover meant that an album charted in different genres, country and pop say. Now a country album will have to do well on pop, rock, AAA and/or other stations simply to get into the country chart. Artists who are only being played on country radio, the 'purists' if you will, artists who almost remind you of country, are going to be pushed out of the top spots because they won't be getting spins in other formats, however pretty they are.

When Bill C Malone stated, in *Country Music USA*, that he accepted as country anything that was marketed as such, I was a little took aback, but then I'm a music critic, 'judgmental' is my middle name, while Malone is an historian, so that position was really the only option for him. However, if, as I sincerely hope, he's able, in the fullness of time, to produce a third revised or fourth edition, he will have to confront a new reality. Apart from a decisive wholesale shift of power to a few superstars, Nashville labels, large and small, will have little alternative but to try to game the *Billboard* charts by only releasing records that have some hope of crossing over into other formats, and I'm sure you can see where that inevitably leads.

The problem for Malone or any other historian will be where to draw the line. For instance, the only times I found the word 'country' used in reviews of *Red* were variations of "Taylor Swift transcends her country roots" (like A. she had any and B. that's a good thing), every reviewer, even in country media, covering it as pure pop. Regardless, it was, maybe still is, *Billboard's* #1 Country Album.

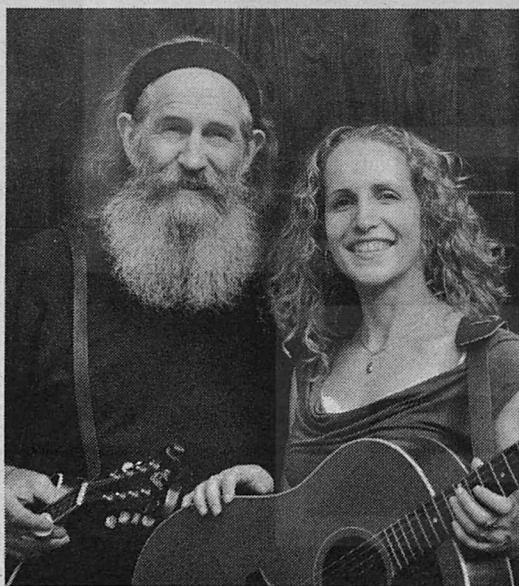
One of the fiercest critics of the new order is Kyle Coroneos ('The Triggerman') of the *Saving Country Music* website, who said "I have a theory all the genres of music are coagulating into one big monogenre." Damn, wish I'd thought of that one.

You may wonder 'Why is JC fretting over stuff that no 3CM reader would care about?' A reasonable question, to which the answer is that, looking back over my own 50 year history with country music, it's like seeing an old, once much-loved, friend descending into a combination of addictions ("typically characterized by immediate gratification coupled with delayed deleterious effects"), schizophrenia ("common symptoms include auditory hallucinations, paranoid or bizarre delusions, accompanied by significant social or occupational dysfunction") and retrograde amnesia ("when previously formed memories are lost. In some cases, the memory loss extends back decades"). If I harp on Taylor Swift, it's nothing personal, but she's shorthand, albeit in bold 96-point, for everything that's changed in country music, and when I say 'changed,' I mean 'turned to shit.'

JC

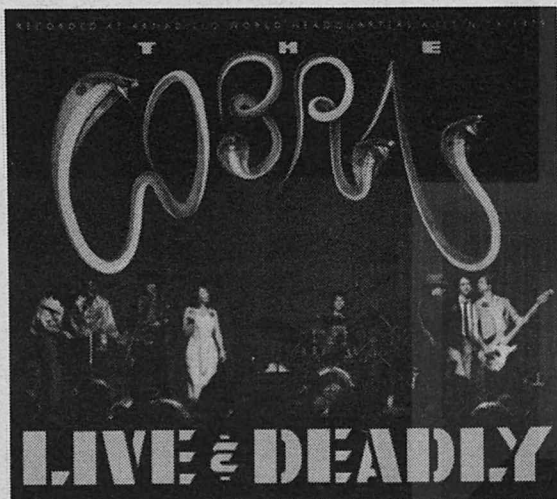


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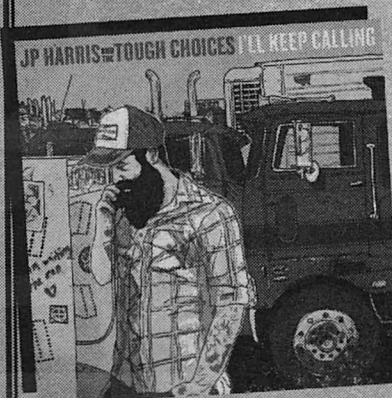
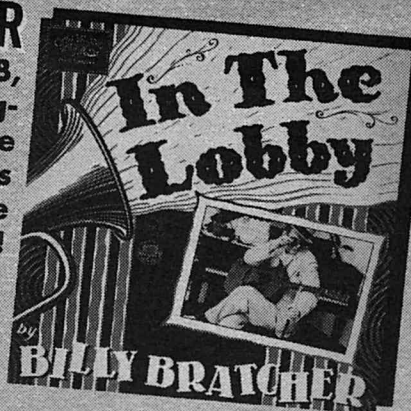
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DAVID OLNEY • Body Of Evidence

(Deadbeat *****)

Guess the slip covers of the mini-albums **Film Noir** (2011) and **The Stone** (April, 2012) were a bit of a giveaway, but, when I reviewed them, I had no idea that they were the first two-thirds of a trilogy, completed by **Robbery & Murder**, with all three now packaged together. Like **Film Noir**, which probed secrecy and ambiguity ("Questions remain") with 5 tracks, and **The Stone**, a multi-faceted look at the Easter story, with six, **Robbery & Murder** packs more into six tracks than most full length albums, twining together two very different love stories. The sequence of *Go Down Dupree*, Chuck Willis' *Betty And Dupree* and *Gold Diamond Ring* starts with what Olney calls "hardcore romantic negotiation" ("I want a diamond ring"), with a robbery closing the deal. The other, much darker, sequence tells of love, adultery and murder told from the points of view of the lover (*Another Place, Another Time*), the homicidal husband (*My Family Owns This Town*) and the wife's ghost (*The Banks Of The River*). Unusually, guitarist extraordinaire Sergio Webb isn't on board for this one, but Olney (guitar, bass, whistle, ukelele, harmonica) doesn't attempt to replace him, relying on producer Jack Irwin (drums, percussion, piano, pump organ, vibes, orchestration) and Jim Hoke (saxes, harmonica, clarinet, autoharp). As a general thing, I don't compare musicians to other musicians, unless it's too damn obvious, but even if I did, there's no useful comparison to Olney, he is sui generis: "a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man... a man of honor. He talks as the man of his age talks, that is, with rude wit, a lively sense of the grotesque, a disgust for sham and a contempt for pettiness." **JC**

CHRIS O'CONNELL • Be Right Back!

(Song *****)

Some people claim that Asleep At The Wheel, which she joined out of high school in 1973, was never the same after O'Connell left for good in 1990, and they still wonder what became of her. I have fond memories of Ethyl 'n' Methyl live shows but she and Maryann Price never recorded (though you can find their Southwestern ads on YouTube), but then O'Connell did seem to disappear, hence the ironic album title. I remember a mutual friend joking about a brief return that she was the only person who ever moved to Austin to not play music. O'Connell put out a children's album in 1992, but this is effectively her debut, with 13 songs that either made her laugh or cry, drawing on not exactly standards from Irving Berlin, Peggy Lee, Johnny Paycheck, Little Willie John, Rogers & Hart, Frank Sinatra and Del Shannon and friends like LeRoy Preston, Bill Kirchen, Blackie Farrell and Brenda Burns. Kirchen is also part of an enormous all-star cast, headed by O'Connell's co-producer Danny Levin, who were tapped selectively to suit each number. If I still had a radio show, I'd be leaning on Jimmy Van Heusen & Carl Sigman's *I Could Have Told You So*. O'Connell's stunning version more than holds its own against those of Dinah Washington, Esther Phillips, Carmen McRae. Eva Cassidy and others, but close behind would be Berlin's show tune *It'll Come To You*. By turns jazzy, bluesy, torchy, jumping, swinging and sultry, O'Connell claims Laura Lee McBride's crown as 'Queen of Western Swing.' **JC**

THE SWEETBACK SISTERS's Country Christmas Singalong Spectacular

(Signature Sounds ****.5)

Major conflict here; I loathe and despise Xmas albums, which, in my experience, are usually put out by major labels, mainly country, to indulge their stars, with the payoff that they'll find out exactly how many hardcore fans those stars actually have. Also, I work in a grocery store that starts to play fucking carols the day after Thanksgiving, so I'm not exactly thrilled by a track list that includes *Santa Claus Is Coming To Town*, *Walking In A Winter Wonderland*, *Silver Bells*, *Rocking Around The Christmas Tree*, *The Twelve Days Of Christmas*, *Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas*, *Must Be Santa* and *Santa Claus Got Stuck In My Chimney*. However, I adore Zara Bode, Emily Miller and Jesse Milnes, enough to forgive 'Singalong,' something else I loathe and despise, so that kinda cancels out. However, while they throw in some curve balls, Milnes' *Nine Days Of Christmas* ("a drinking song set at Christmastide"), a tribute to Mike Spalla's Jingle Cats and an instrumental version of *It's Beginning To Look A Lot Like Christmas*, there's only so much these three wonderful singers and harmonizers can do with most of this stuff and the album would fall rather flat if it wasn't for the musicians, most particularly Ross Bellenoit, whose electric and acoustic guitar work gives this an edge that you won't find on your regular Nashville seasonal. **Christmas with Buck Owens & His Buckaroos** will always hard to top, if only because it was all-original, but if you're in the mood for chestnuts roasted just right, **The Sweetback Sisters** have just the album for you. **JC**

MICHAEL KOPPY • Ashmore's Store GEORGE WIRTH • The Last Good Kiss

(Good Track ****.5/Rosie's Cafe *****)

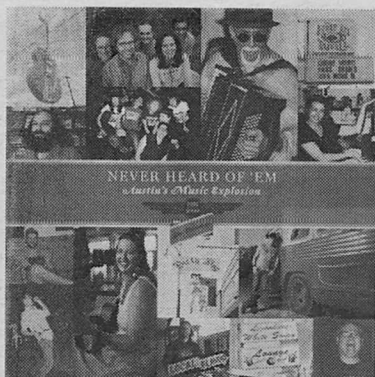
Butch Hancock aside, songs that run over about five minutes are very unusual, so, at 27.26, Kopp's stream of consciousness folk opera, inspired by Thomas Pynchon and Jean-Luc Godard, *All In The Timing: A Hollywood Romance In Seven Chapters*, is really out there. Less than half as long as Kopp's first draft, even the truncated version rates 195 footnotes (!) in the 112 page booklet—the package looks like a box set, but, apart from the credits, the lyrics and those footnotes, Kopp tells the story, at length and illustrated, of Ashmore's Store, a white owned pharmacy in Tallahassee's black business neighborhood, where he hung out in the 60s and 70s. Winding up in San Francisco, Kopp found his way into the entertainment business, but confined his own music to his front porch, rewriting 'dumb' cowboy, country and pop songs, until 2001, when a barmaid explained the concept of Open Mike to him. Making a splash in the local scene with his provocative originals and revisions, Kopp put out a couple of comparatively normal albums before this blockbuster. You have to parse some of his songs, all originals apart from a rather odd take on *We Shall Overcome*, an adaptation of WB Yeats' poem *He Wishes For The Cloths Of Heaven* and a 1972 recording of bluesman Emmett Goodman singing his own *Elvis Presley* and *Over The Rainbow* on the sidewalk in front of Ashmore's. For instance, the opening *One Great Mornin'* (*The South's Gonna Rise Again*) is actually about what was any good about the Old South reacting against the imported crap of the New South (the Florida Panhandle really seems to bother songwriters). An ambitious project, probably overambitious when it comes to airplay of the main track, intriguing and occasionally OTT, this is not for the attention deficit. **JC**

Like Kopp, George Wirth, from Brick, NJ, is a late bloomer, who only began performing professionally in 1995, when he was 48. While they think well of him in Asbury Park, half an hour north, where he's picked up Jersey Acoustic Musicians Awards ("Jammies") as Top Male Songwriter 2010 and 2011 and Album of the Year 2011, he seems to be a definitive local hero but a 3CM subscriber came across him and was impressed enough to send me copies of his albums, for which I sure am grateful. Unheard, Wirth racks up a lot of points by 'borrowing' his album title from James Crumley's classic hardboiled novel, having the good taste to hire Amanda Shires and being an opening act for the Asbury Park leg of Kevin Triplett's **Blaze Foley; Duct Tape Messiah** tour. Then he gets off to a slightly worrying start with a song about The Second Coming, *I Will Not Go Down Easily This Time*, but his edgy take on the Messiah's return works for me, and, though invoking Jesus walking on water, *Weight Of Sin* is basically a love song. Wirth draws you into his mature, tough-minded songs with his gruff but bell clear voice, comfortable as an old overcoat, quite exceptional pacing and a superb sense of what suits each song, playing most of them solo, but sprinkling some fantastic fairy dust on others, Amanda Shires plays fiddle on two tracks, nuff said, Abbie Gardner of Red Molly adds lap steel on one, dobro and vocals on another, Jim McCarthy plays dobro while Janey Todd sings and plays recorder on her *Dreamland*, the only song of the 14 not written by Wirth. From New Jersey to Texas via Utah, albums as good as this are what I live for. **JC**

MAC CURTIS • The Rollin' Rock Recordings Vol 1

(Part [Germany] *****)

Rockabilly legend Wesley Erwin 'Mac' Curtis signed to King Records in 1955, and after the classic *If I Had Me A Woman*, *Granddaddy's Rockin'*, and *You Ain't Treatin' Me Right* were released in quick succession, he & The Country Cats were booked for Alan Freed's 1956 Christmas Rock & Roll Revue. Then Curtis went back to Weatherford, TX, to finish high school. A great start, but he was called up in November 1957 and when he got back from Korea in 1960, rockabilly had gone out of style, so he became a country singer and DJ. A decade later, he learned from Ronnie Weiser that his seven King singles were still revered in Europe and, after Weiser introduced them, Curtis and Ray Campi started making 45s and LPs for Weiser's Rollin' Rock label. Part's **Vol 1** consists of the first two of those LPs, **Ruffabilly** (1973) and **Good Rockin' Tomorrow** (1975), so it's safe to assume that **Vol 2** will draw on **Rock Me** (1978) and **The Rollin' Rock & Rebel Singles** (Rollin' Rock [Switzerland], 1995). some, but far from all, of which were on **Rockabilly Uprising** (Hightone, 1997). Curtis was in very good form on these recordings, he was, after all, still in his 30s during the Rollin' Rock years, and this would make a good companion to **Rockabilly Kings** (Ace [UK], 2005), which combines both sides of all of Mac Curtis' and Charlie Feathers' 50s King singles. You can't beat that with a stick and I happen to know it's available from Antone's Record Shop. **JC**



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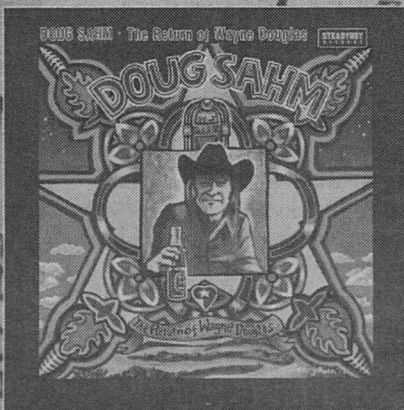
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JOHN THE REVEALATOR

Brain fart time again—one of the unfortunate side effects of having to subedit your own words is that you can miss blindingly obvious, you know better than that, mistakes. Last month, I mentioned a Blaze Foley song being featured on *The Mentalist*, but, for no good reason whatsoever, converted *Cold Cold World* into *Cruel Cruel World*. While I think of it, we're a bit late to this particular party, but we're catching up on *Breaking Bad*, which, in Season 2, used The Be Good Tanyas' cover of Townes Van Zandt's *Waitin' Around To Die*. I'd have preferred the original, but even so, who knew TV people had good taste in music?

- I asked him for comment a bit late in the day, but **Hank Alrich**, onetime owner of Armadillo World HQ, had this to say about **Plum Nelly**, and I didn't want to just lift a quote. "Plum Nelly was a fascinating band, and really addictive to many. They offered casually tight execution of subtly excellent arrangements, great singing, four-part harmonies, hot picking, powerful, positive organic eroticism emanating from Jerrie Jo Jones (uncontrived—like Janiva Magness), all this from what looked like a recently bathed collection of traveling minstrels that happened to include one who wrote fine songs. I'm having difficulty getting at this verbally, but this was one fucking fun band to hear and see—they looked so loose and worked together so tightly I'm struck that the final picture is just what one might envision of a quintessential Austin 'progressive country' band of the mid-1970's led by a guy named Billy Stoner. I mean, some of that shit you can't make up. I'm noting a large musical irony in the term 'progressive country' vis a vis a band like Plum Nelly. They were much more like an old-time string band, but not in emulation—contemporary (what's old is new again, and again, and marketing conveniently forgets what it used to be called). Eventually Billy's suspicions that Johnny [Richardson, Plum Nelly's guitarist] and Jerrie Jo were making the beast with two backs was confirmed when he walked in his front door to find them fucking on the living room rug. End of story."

- Responding to last month KFAT story, **Obie Obermark**, the worlds' tallest DJ, on KNON, Dallas, recalls, "DFW had KFAD from the late 60s through the mid-70s. We called it 'underground' radio at first like it was subversive for daring to play something other than the Doobie Bros and their ilk. You could call 'em up and they would actually play The Grateful Dead or The Velvet Underground, and they immediately latched onto the 'Cosmic Cowboy' tunes when they started coming up from Austin. KFAD was the genesis of Dallas radio legends John Dillon and Glenn Mitchell, and for a while had a kid named **Joe Nick Patoski** behind the mic. They kept me sane (well, nearly) in the late 60s-early 70s when there was absolutely NOTHING else worth a listen on Dallas radio." Incidentally, according to an online history of Dallas/Fort Worth FM radio, Patoski, later a Senior Editor at *Texas Monthly*, made \$1.60 an hour working at KFAD.

- Closer to home, **Ed Miller**, currently host of KUT's *Across The Water* (folk music from Scotland, Ireland & England) and, alternate weeks, of *Sunday Folkways*, puts in a bid for a position in the long-serving DJs HoF. Ed has been playing everything from Cajun, Tex-Mex and blues to old timey, bluegrass & singer-songwriters since 1971,

which does put him up there among radio veterans. My problem with KUT, even though I know there still good guys like Miller, Michael Crockett and Paul Ray hanging on there, is that ever since it decided to become KGeezer, I can't bring myself to preset it, because, sure as the jack of spades will jump out of the deck and squirt cider in your ear, I know something utterly unspeakable will happen, probably sooner than later.

- Taylor Swift** and Big Machine's **Scott Borchetta** should ask is where are N Sync and The Backstreet Boys now? Though these bands and their **Max Martin**-produced songs enjoyed wild commercial success in their time, the shallowness of the compositions eventually eroded any longevity in the projects. As an artist whose been outspoken for wanting to be known for her songwriting and substance, teaming up with Shellback and Max Martin could be a slippery slope for Swift. One can only hope.

- Michael Koppy's 26+ minutes long song (see reviews) reminded me of being at Kerrville Folk Festival some years ago. The program was running a bit late, so, from the side of the stage, Rod Kennedy held up one finger to **Butch Hancock**, indicating, of course, that he wanted Butch to play one just more song. Butch smiled and nodded and then ended his set with *Last Long Silver Dollar*—which lasts around 20 minutes.

- As footnotes to this month's editorial, to illustrate the drinking age/amount problem, a few anecdotes. Griff Luneburg, long time booker of **Cactus Cafe**, once told me he couldn't book a popular singer he personally admired because he'd take too heavy a hit at the bar, "her crowd just doesn't drink enough." Calling in their next month's calendar, **La Zona Rosa's** booker told me they'd be charging more than double the going cover for David Garza. When I asked why, Laura told me, "because his entire audience is 16-year old girls, so the only money we're going to see is at the door." When I said, "Really? 16-year olds?" she added, "Oh yes, by the time they're 17 they've got over it." Before the **Saxon Pub** reopened, Craig Hillis got with me on advertising (he stiffed me, but that's another story), and listed every Tuesday as Rusty Weir. When I asked if Rusty still drew, Hillis said, "Hell no, he never has more than about 25 people, but they drink more than 250 regular people, and his bar tab is always more than the guarantee, so he'll always have gig with us."

- As you may have read, Joy Williams and John Paul White, aka **The Civil Wars**, have gone to Splitsville, canceling their tour dates. However, their announcement was somewhat ambiguous, or possibly just illiterate. First they said that "due to internal discord and irreconcilable differences of ambition we are unable to continue as a touring entity at this time." However, this was immediately followed by "Our sincere hope is to have new music for you in 2013." Where I come from, 'irreconcilable' means something along the lines of 'if I never see you again, it'll be too soon for me,' so building in an escape hatch seems a tad disingenuous. Of course, they may be saying 'we can't tolerate each other on the road, but we can put up with each other in a studio long enough to make an album.' Or maybe they're planning to record in different studios or at different times and then have their parts overdubbed so they never actually cross paths.

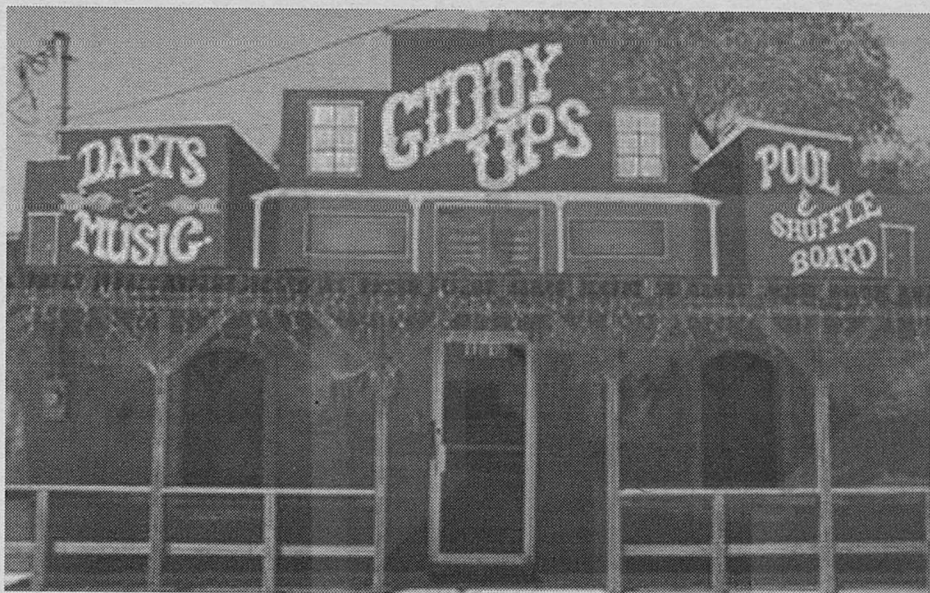
- Frankly, it's no skin off my nose if **The Civil Wars** never record again, I don't think their schtick has much in the way of legs. Still, I was rather surprised to see the usually hard-nosed *Saving Country Music* website headlining a story about their split as 'Americana Loses Its Greatest Ambassador' on the strength of their commercial success, which, though they racked up more nominations than actual gongs, supposedly brought Americana to the masses, even though the writer admitted to not liking them too much himself. Still, that's an arguable point, unlike a review in *American Songwriter* that appeared *after* the breakup but which referred to the duo's "adoring chemistry." That sounds to me like the diametrical opposite of "internal discord," but what do I know?

- After my conversation with Ernie Gammage about Disco destroying Austin's Progressive Country Music scene, I was surfing for some insight on the impact of Disco and stumbled across a oldish story, from last February, about 'silent disco' at Austin's Cedar Creek Courtyard. Being Downtown, the martini bar's outdoor space has certain problems complying with the new Noise Ordinance and last February experimented with "an emerging concept in which audience members listen to live or electronic music being performed over wireless headphones instead of through loud speakers." Pass the sick bag, Alice.

† BERNARD LANSKY

Elvis Presley bought his prom outfit, black pants, a pink coat and a pink-and-black cummerbund, from Lansky Bros, 126 Beale St, Memphis, but rather more consequentially, Bernard Lansky provided him with the outfit, a plaid sports coat and pegged pants, that he wore for his first appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Elvis also bought his first gold lamé jacket from Lansky and was buried in a white suit with blue tie made by Lansky (who had nothing to do with his intervening sequined jumpsuits). Though BB King was already a regular customer, Presley's imprimatur brought Lansky business from Carl Perkins, Roy Orbison, Isaac Hayes, the Jacksons, The Beach Boys, Sam The Sham, Bobby 'Blue' Bland, ZZ Top and Kiss, though, for my money, his crowning achievement was creating the iconic 'Man In Black' image, a cutaway coat with black pants, modeled on the Prince Albert tobacco tin picture, for Johnny Cash. Born in Memphis, March 10th, 1927, Bernard Joseph Lansky, one of the great music haberdashers, rivaled only by Nudie Cohn, died of Alzheimer's on November 15th, age 85.

Nothing to do with music, but I was just reminded of the Nina Simone/**Dick Gregory** concert I mentioned last month. This would have been in 1967, but I still well remember Gregory telling his London audience that if blacks in the South wanted to buy a can of a particular tobacco, they had to ask for '**Mister Prince Albert**,' because Prince Albert was a white man. That got a good laugh, but then Gregory said, "You think that's a joke, don't you? Well, it isn't." To this day, thanks to Gregory, I still think of Southern racists as being rather sad and pitiful, on top, of course, of being utterly despicable. I imagine there are people who wouldn't call Barack Obama 'Mister President' because he isn't a white man under the 'one-drop' rule. Only in America.



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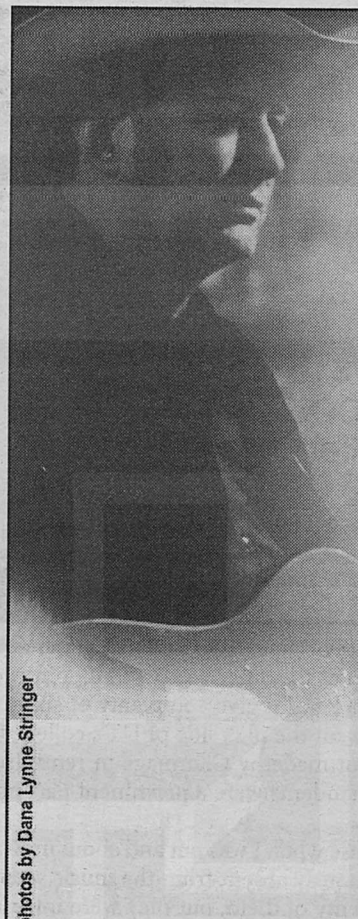


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*Reports to the Freeform American Roots (FAR) Chart



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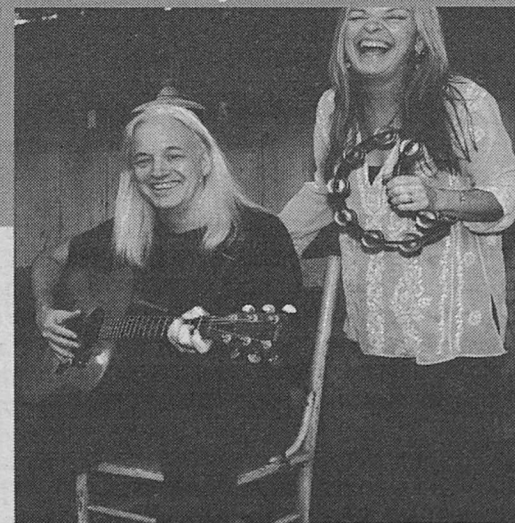


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***** What's not to like? *** Can do better
** Why did they bother? * Piss on this noise

UTEXAS VS UKANSAS

Ernie Gammage says of his 60s frat band days, "My Dad used to joke to his friends that I was sending him money from college instead of the other way around." Fifty years on, unless I missed that particular bumper sticker, I'd give you plenty of six to five against the proposition that any student/musician is on the plus side of UT's college fees. However, that's actually a side issue to a larger point made by Gammage in reminiscing about life in Austin during the 70s, which was that students were a prominent part of the audience for progressive country.

This came as something of a surprise to me because when I was out and about in Austin in the late 80s and early 90s, students were conspicuously absent from the music scene. If you stood outside, say, Chicago House, you'd see plenty of them, but they were invariably headed towards one of the Sixth Street bars that didn't look too close at IDs or, at best, one of the venues that featured cover bands. Even UT's own Cactus Cafe was almost entirely dependent on townies.

Gammage blames Disco for killing off live music, however, there was another major change between Plum Nelly's time and my initial Austin experience and that was the legal drinking age, which had been lowered from 21 to 18 in 1973, part of a national movement to link it to voting age and the draft, when even politicians realized that there something a bit off about 18-year old voters being forbidden to sink an adult beverage before being shipped off to fight in Vietnam.

In 1981, MADD pushed the Texas legislature to raise the drinking age to 19, and in 1986, because of Reagan's National Minimum Drinking Age Act of 1984, it reverted back to 21, so the music scene lost three years worth of potential customers in perpetuity. Musicians whose crowd was known for not drinking, or was too young to drink, had trouble getting gigs, while those whose crowd was famously two-fisted were welcome anywhere. The draw is one thing, the bar take another altogether. The cold reality of music venue economics was summarized by James McMurtry, who sardonically remarked, "I thought I was a musician, but I came to find out I was a beer salesman."

Still, you can't really blame the drinking age alone for UT students not supporting original live music. A friend who teaches at the University of Kansas told me that students there would turn out to support anything from bagpipes to death metal, and (coincidentally?) in 2005 *The New York Times* said that Lawrence had "the most vital music scene between Chicago and Denver." To save you the trouble of checking, yes, Austin is also between Chicago and Denver. Though Kansas has a colorful history—at one time trains and planes were supposed to stop serving alcohol while they were in or over the state—its drinking age was similarly raised from 18 to 21 in 1985.

So, the change in drinking age is, obviously enough, not the cause of student disengagement from local music. However, if you take legitimate IDs that prove you're over 21 out of the equation (though I don't discount the possibility of some UT students being sufficiently into music to acquire something that would pass inspection), what's left is the nature of the student body. UT's reputation, routinely in *Playboy* and *Princeton's Review's* Top 10 Party Schools, may be a stereotype, but it's always saddened me that, in the years I've been here, countless thousands of young people have spent four years in Austin and couldn't name a local musician if their lives depended on it.

JC

PLUM NELLY USED TO BE A REDNECK

(Gambini Global *****)

Ernie Gammage, who played bass, sang high harmonies and wrote some of the songs for Plum Nelly, includes, in his liner notes to the band's collected recordings from the mid-70s, a partial list of 'Austin Progressive Country Acts.' Some are still active, notably Butch Hancock, Joe Ely, Jimmie Dale Gilmore and Alvin Crow. Several have passed on, BW Stevenson, Blaze Foley, Doug Sahm, John Vandiver, Jubal Clark, Rusty Weir and Townes Van Zandt. The names of some long defunct groups, such as Freda & The Firedogs and Balcones Fault, still resonated in the late 80s/early 90s, while Greezy Wheels was resurrected in 2001 after a 25 year break. However, there are many names on Gammage's list that mean nothing to me, Big Bill Moss, Buckdancer's Choice, Doak Sneed, Kiwi, Lou Ray, Milton Carroll, Rick Stein & The Alley Cat Band, Rob Moorman & The Silver City Saddletamps, T Gosney Thornton and Wheatfield. To be honest, that last group includes Plum Nelly. I'd never heard of them until Ernie told me he was sending me a copy of this album.

While at UT, Gammage had played in frat party bands, but in 1972, on returning from a couple of years spent in England, he found that all his rock musician friends were wearing cowboy hats and boots and playing shitkicker music. To give you some idea of how radical was this sea change, The 13th Floor Elevators' bassplayer, the late Benny Thurman, was Plum Nelly's fiddler.

Gammage also has a partial list of Austin's 'Progressive Country Venues' that includes Shakey's Pizza Parlor, where Tennessean truckdriver Billy Stoner met singing waitress Jerrie Jo Jones, the two forming a duo named after a wide space in the road that's "plum outta Tennessee and nelly into Georgia." After winning a New Folk contest at the second Kerrville Folk Festival in 1974, Stoner and Jones enlisted Thurman and Gammage into a band that had four singers, exceptional harmonies and no drums ("one time, Billy wanted to try Rick Something, but it didn't work out"). Another Venue was The Dime Box Inn, "a shithole, but Plum Nelly got its start there and after a month, you couldn't get in." Soon, the band, which eventually included guitarist Johnny Richardson, was playing legendary places such as Soap Creek Saloon and The Split Rail, and making a fan of *Austin-American Statesman* country music columnist Townsend Miller, "In my opinion, none of the 70 'undiscovered' groups based in Austin has a better chance of making it to the big time." 70? Remember that Austin was much smaller back then. However, Miller also thought that Jones, who Gammage describes as "drop dead gorgeous and could sing like a bird," would surely be a super-star someday, when, in point of fact, she got married soon after Plum Nelly morphed into Mother Of Pearl in 1976 and never sang again, and he credited the band with being dedicated to rehearsal, but Gammage says, "we never rehearsed!"

When he started putting together a musical history of Plum Nelly, Gammage had five sources. The first he dubbed 'Mystery Recording c 1974' because no one from the band could remember when, where, why or by whom the five tracks were recorded (I know the feeling, I'm not good with dates round that time either). They were Billy Stoner's thematic *Devil & The Deep Blue Sea* ("I'm a long haired redneck, don't you mess with me"), Benny's *Instrumental Medley, Columbus Stockade Blues* and Gammage's *Girl At The Dobbs House*.

The second set was from Plum Nelly's brief flirtation with Nashville. Scouts from Screen Gems-EMI told a cab driver to take them to the best country band in Austin, so he drove them to where Plum Nelly was playing. In October 1974, with session musicians, the band recorded Gammage, Stoner & Jones' *Ole Devil's Smile* and *If It Weren't For This Feeling*, Gammage's *The Reds, The Blacks And The Blues*, Gammage & Jones' *Girl Hold On To Love* and Stoner's *If You Make It The Good Times Will Roll*. They also cut a couple of Screen Gems songs which the band didn't like, so Gammage didn't include them. "We didn't click. Nashville didn't know what the hell to do with Freda & The Firedogs, same thing with Plum Nelly." It may not have helped that three of their originals had drug references.

After that things get kinda scrappy, live at the Alliance Wagon Yard, 1976, there's Benny's *Vocal Medley*; from March 1975, Stoner's *There's Nothing I Can Do* recorded at Armadillo World HQ and, live at Kerrville Folk Festival, *Sixteen Tons* (1975) and *May The Circle Be Unbroken, Kaw-Liga* and *Orange Blossom Special* (1974).

Forty years on, the covers may seem somewhat Country 101—Gammage credits KOKE-FM with providing Austin's musicians with an ongoing education—but, like **Freda & The Firedogs** (Plug, 2002), released 30 years after it was recorded, **Used To Be A Redneck** is a reminder of a vibrant scene, one that essentially put Austin on the musical map and whose influence is still felt to this day.

JC

John Fullbright

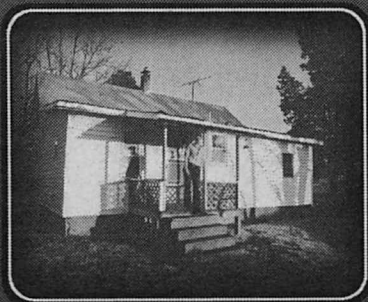
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The Eggmen..... 8:00

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Sahara Smith..... 3:30
Shinyribs..... 8:00

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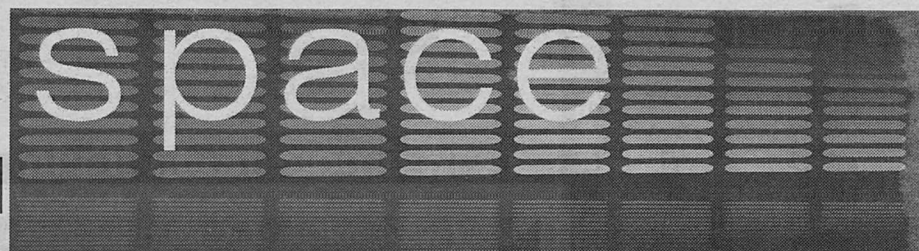
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20th Danny Britt, 7pm
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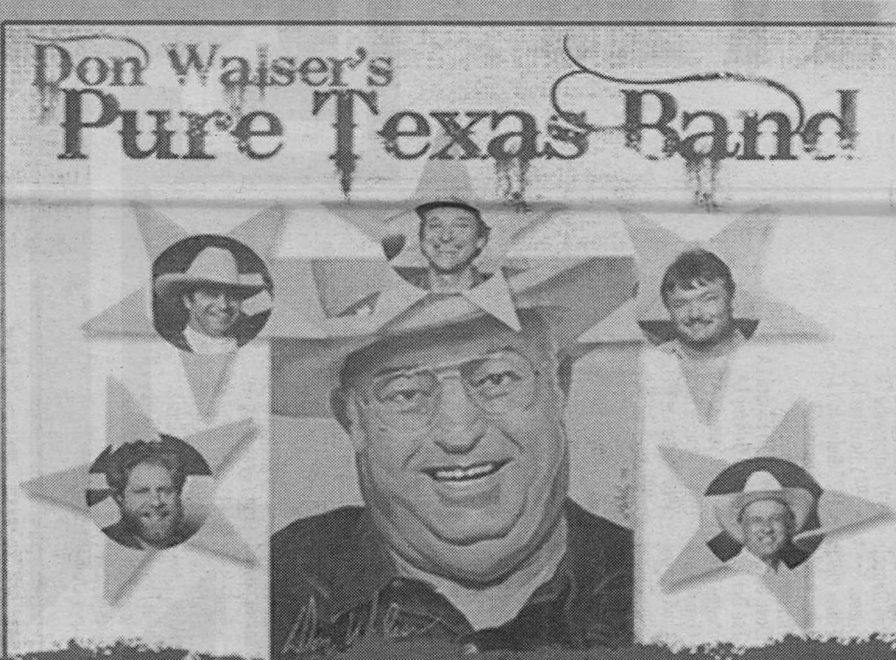
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- 7th Tom Waits • 1949 Pomona CA
Bill Boyd † 1977
- 8th Floyd Tillman • 1914 Ryan OK
Ernie Gammage • 1944 Brownwood TX
Marty Robbins † 1982
- 9th Dan Hicks • 1941 Little Rock AR
- 10th Rich Minus • 1940 San Antonio TX
Johnny Rodriguez • 1951 Sabinal TX
Otis Redding † 1967
Faron Young † 1996
- 11th Big Mama Thornton • 1926 Montgomery AL
Tom Brumley • 1935 Stella MO
Brenda Lee • 1944 Lithonia GA
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